

Dear legislators

I am writing this letter to ask you to consider an increase in funding for foster families to allow them to continue in their service to foster children.

I, Russ Genaw and my wife Mary Ellen have been doing fostering for 15 yrs. We have seen many foster parents come and go. One of the problems is that it becomes difficult to do the care they wish to do, without adequate help in the funding allowed.

I realize it is difficult times, but we cannot short-change our foster children in the case of those with a heart to help. The other thing is that there is no institution that could take care of children if the rates were paid.

Yours truly  
Russell E Genaw &  
Mary Ellen Genaw

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
HB353 "REVISE FOSTER CARE RATES"

My wife, Bonnie, and I are starting our seventh year providing foster care for teen age boys at our home in Hamilton. We are 55 years of age, have college degrees, have run our own business for the past 27 years, are respected members of our community, and offer a high level of care for youth entrusted to our care.

We were forced to increase prices at our business last year as cost continued to spiral higher. If we would have continued to absorb these increased costs, we would be out of business.

Likewise, as fuel prices rose to unexpected highs this past Summer, and food, clothing, school supplies, entertainment, transportation, and home maintenance costs continued on the increase, it caused us to reflect on our decision to continue providing foster care.

We can assure you, foster care is definitely not a profitable financial venture, but it has become increasingly more difficult with the present stipend.

The need for quality care for these youth is enormous, and we have a deep desire to offer these kids an opportunity for a better chance in life. Help us to continue working with foster youth by providing a reasonable stipend for their care...and pass HB353!

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,  
Jeffrey R. Montgomery  
Bonnie M. Montgomery  
406-363-2580

January 28, 2009

Denyse Vanek  
P.O. 2191  
East Helena, MT 59635  
406-227-3398  
[dndvanek@hotmail.com](mailto:dndvanek@hotmail.com)

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is regarding the Bill to Increase Foster Care Rates HB353.

Foster Rates need to be increased for many reasons. The cost of everything is going up but the payments are not. The current rates for Montana are \$515.00 for a 2 year old, \$475.00 for a 9 year old and \$572.00 for a 16 year old. According to Hitting The M.A.R.C. Establishing Foster Care Minimum Adequate Rates for Children put out by Children's Rights, the National Foster Parent Association and the University of Maryland School of Social Work, we are falling short by 16% for 2 year olds, 44% for 9 year olds and 31% for 16 year olds. Remember, Hitting The M.A.R.C. are for MINIMUM rates only. In other words we are not even getting the minimum amount we need to provide care.

Just to be approved to be a foster parent can be costly. You have to have fire extinguishers, smoke detectors in every bedroom, locks on medicine cabinets, locks on guns and ammunition, egress windows in all bedrooms, plugs in all electrical outlets, anchors on swing sets, currently vaccinated animals and children, along with many other items. These are all things you may or may not have in your home but have to have prior to becoming a foster parent. Also, to maintain your license as a foster parent you must complete 15 training hours annually and the cost of the training is the responsibility of the foster parent.

I have made an itemized list of the cost of basic living expenses for our household for the month on January 2009. It will give the total for the house and then divided by 6 to show the individual portions for each of our 6 family members. My husband and I have 2 biological children, one adopted child and one foster child. Please remember that automotive fuel is very cheap right now but the price is going up and was much higher in the past.

	Actual cost	Divided by 6
Automotive fuel	124.00	20.66
Groceries	618.00	92.00
Natural gas and Electricity	377.00	62.83
Car Insurance	121.00	20.17
Water/Sewer/Garbage	66.00	11.00
House Insurance	46.00	7.66
Telephone	26.00	4.33
Mortgage	1288.00	214.66
Total	2666.00	433.31

That is just for basics. I haven't even mentioned clothes, which infants grow out of every few months and older kids a season at most. Foster parents are supposed to get a clothing allowance every time they get a child but we often don't get it and it has to come out of our monthly amount. This is not just pants and shirts but underwear, socks, coats, shoes, boots, mittens, hats, dress, play and school clothes. I didn't tell you that kids are hard on

stuff often loosing, tearing, and staining their things. The state says we have to provide all the kids we have to that similar of other kids in the neighborhood.

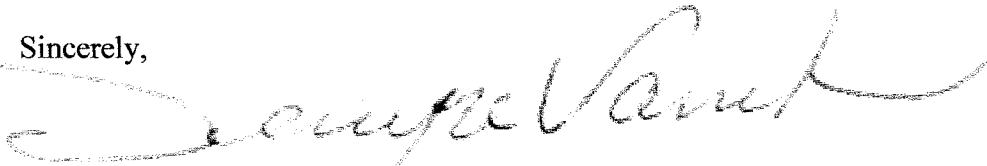
Also, there is the cost of preschool if Head Start is full and the cost of gas taking them to school.

**WHAT ABOUT:**

- Allowance or some spending-money for the child
- 
- Eating out
- Recreational Activities
- Ethnic Opportunities
- Sports and the clothes and equipment needed
- Hobby activities
- Church Sunday School fee
- Toys
- Books
- Birthdays and Holidays gifts or money to buy gifts
- Foster kids also need potty chairs, playpens, highchairs, car seats, beds, bedding, baby swings, bottles, pacifiers, cups, dishes, utensils, cribs

But most importantly they need love and acceptance in a stable home. To keep foster parents doing their jobs they have to have the funds to do it. If it becomes too much of a financial burden there will be no foster parents, no homes for the children who need them most!

Sincerely,



Denyse Vanek (A broke foster parent)  
P.O. Box 2191  
East Helena, MT 59635  
406-227-3398  
[dndvanek@hotmail.com](mailto:dndvanek@hotmail.com)

**MARC**

Catherine Berg [mediouchicat@imt.net]

**Sent:** Sunday, February 08, 2009 12:28 PM

**To:** Costigan, Twila

Twila,

I hope this is adequate. I could write a book on this subject, but tried to keep it simple. Let me know if you need more.

Catherine

My name is Catherine Berg, and I am a state foster care parent on the Crow Reservation. Five years ago my husband and I decided to try being foster parents because we had the space and saw the need. We take in up to six children at any given time with many staying between 8 months to 1 1/2 years.

In the last two years our resources at the local clinic have been downsized significantly. We no longer have access to a regular pediatrician or eye doctor. We also have never had local access to any child psychologist which has been required by all our children above the age of 2 yrs. This has forced us to travel 45 miles to the nearest city for these resources. Since the addition of foster children in our home, our trips to town have increased from once or twice a month to three or four times a week depending on the services they require. Combined with rising fuel prices and wear on our vehicles, these costs have far out-weighted any compensations we receive for travel.

Additionally, our monthly stipends have not increased to compensate for the rising costs of food, electricity, propane, diapers, wipies, lotion, bath products, laundry supplies, toys, etc. Although our children are given clothing allowances, we inevitably have to spend our own money on clothes, shoes, and undergarments.

Presently, I am one of two homes in our county that can take multiple placements of younger children and/or large sibling groups. All the children I have cared for suffer from a number of disorders that make it essential that I stay home with them. These range from attachment and eating disorders, physical problems, fetal alcohol syndrome, in vitro drug exposure, post traumatic stress disorder, sexual abuse, oppositional disorders, and obsessive/compulsive behaviors. They also have missed important developmental stages due to the nature of their experiences and we have to "start over". I have had to teach older children how to eat, brush their teeth, and dress themselves.

I love what I do, but have to wrestle with the decision to continue each month when I review our budget.

Sincerely,  
Catherine Berg  
PO Box 248  
Pryor, MT 59066  
(406) 248-8732

## Costigan, Twila

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**From:** wichman [wichman@mtintouch.net]  
**Sent:** Sunday, February 08, 2009 2:07 PM  
**To:** Costigan, Twila  
**Subject:** FW: CFSD Budget

Dear Twila,

I had sent this to Shirley on Wed. I'm not sure if she forwarded it or not. If you need anything more, let us know.

Thanks, Mary and Gordon Wichman

[wichman@mtintouch.net](mailto:wichman@mtintouch.net)

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**From:** wichman [mailto:wichman@mtintouch.net]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 04, 2009 6:35 AM  
**To:** 'shbrown@mt.gov'  
**Subject:** CFSD Budget

To Whom It May Concern:

We have been foster/adoptive parents for 13 years now. We are in support of Marc bill HB353. I'm quite certain that without the current pay we get that we would not be able to provide children the kind of care that they need in our foster home. Even then at times it does get tough. We give each child that comes in our home the same opportunities and things that our own children have had. And with that it takes a lot of time and money. Each child is able to participate in community and school activities, dresses the same as other children, and is given every chance to be "normal" that we can give them. We may have a large family, but I still feel it is important to provide these things for each child. Most of these children that come to us have low self esteem and self worth. It is important to make them feel good from the inside out and make them feel like they are somebody. I'm not saying money does it, but it does enable us to provide for them in a way that they can be like "other" children. It even helps in providing balanced meals to be put on the table, something many of these children have never had. They can participate in various activities, whether it is community, school, or family activities, which helps in building their self worth among other things. They can dress like everyone else too. One other thing we get is respite care, which at times is much needed. We work 24/7 with these troubled children. If the budgets are cut, the state will lose a lot of foster homes and not many foster homes will be opened. A lot of time and energy goes into each child and I don't think you will have many people lined up to do the work for free or having it take money out of their pockets.

In a house the size of ours it takes a lot of money monthly to provide good quality care to the children. The basics are covered most months and the rest comes from our pockets. We spend \$2000-\$2200 monthly on groceries alone, and another \$500 on electricity and heat. Our plan is to continue care for children for another 17 years. We are hoping that financially we can do that. At times now we struggle. I think it is sad because we do need good foster homes. At times I know there have been very few homes in the state with openings, and then where do the children go? If anything is needed it is to give raises in our daily care, clothing needs, respite, and travel. I'm thinking that since we began this journey 13 years ago the only thing we seen a raise in is the daily rate. We all know clothing, gas and daycare needs have taken a jump in those years.

It takes money to have good quality homes to provide that same kind of care. It is cheaper to give these children a better base in their lives in a good home that will get them the services they need and the tools they need for life, then to ignore it all and have them living in prisons or institutions in their later years. I'm not saying all the children will end up like that, but a few will. Some will also keep the cycle going by ending up having their own children put in foster care, which we have all seen happen. Our children need and deserve more than that.

Please support Marc bill HB 353. Please support the children. Please support our future leaders.

Thank you,

Mary Wichman

[wichman@mtintouch.net](mailto:wichman@mtintouch.net)



# HITTING THE M.A.R.C.

Establishing Foster Care  
**Minimum Adequate Rates for Children**

Technical Report



## ESTABLISHING FOSTER CARE MINIMUM ADEQUATE RATES FOR CHILDREN

# MONTANA

**More than 2,200 of Montana's children are in foster care.  
Abused and neglected children have the right to receive  
appropriate care while in government custody.**

State and local child welfare systems are obligated by federal law to provide payments to foster parents to cover the basic needs of children in foster care, including food, shelter, clothing and school supplies. Inadequate payment rates can mean that children in foster care do not receive necessary care. Low rates can negatively affect foster parent recruitment and retention, which can set off a chain reaction of long-term life consequences for children. When a child welfare system cannot maintain an adequate pool of foster homes, children may be more likely to be placed in institutional facilities, which are costly, or shuttled from placement to placement, an unstable situation which harms children and can decrease their chances of growing up in a permanent family.

A national research study has established Foster Care Minimum Adequate Rates for Children (the "Foster Care MARC") for all 50 states and the District of Columbia, the first-ever calculation of the real expenses of caring for children in foster care in the United States.

**Montana's current foster care rates must be increased by up to 44%  
In order to cover the real costs of providing care for children.**

Montana's Current Monthly Foster Care Rate <sup>1</sup>	Foster Care MARC <sup>2</sup> for Montana	To hit the Foster Care MARC, Montana's current rate must be increased by:
Age 2: \$515	\$598 + travel and childcare expenses	16%
Age 9: \$475	\$685 + travel and childcare expenses	44%
Age 16: \$572	\$751 + travel and childcare expenses	31%

### Montana Stats<sup>3</sup>

Number of children in foster care:	2,222
Number of licensed family foster homes:	946
Average number of different foster care placements children experience:	2.8
Percent of children placed in facilities (rather than family foster homes):	14%
Average length of time spent in foster care:	27.6 months (2.3 years)

For more information about the Foster Care MARC, please visit these websites:

  
[www.childrensrights.org](http://www.childrensrights.org)

  
[www.nfpainc.org](http://www.nfpainc.org)

  
[www.family.umaryland.edu](http://www.family.umaryland.edu)

<sup>1</sup> Current as of 05/07, Source: National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, Foster care maintenance payments, [www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp/info\\_services/foster-care.html](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp/info_services/foster-care.html) (2007), supplemented with additional research by Children's Rights.

<sup>2</sup> The Foster Care MARC includes travel expenses associated with the daily provision of basic care to children. However, due to the variability in expenses, the Foster Care MARC does not include the cost of travel for visitation with the child's biological family, travel to administrative and judicial reviews or the cost of full-time child care for working foster parents. Foster parents should be reimbursed for their actual expenses for these purposes, in addition to the Foster Care MARC.

<sup>3</sup> All data from CWLA, NDAS, <http://ndas.cwla.org> (2004), except number of children in foster care which is from AFCARS (2005).



TO: House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Twila Costigan, Foster/Adoptive Parent & Child Advocate

DATE: February 9, 2009

RE: HB353 Revising Foster Care Rates

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee for the record my name is Twila Costigan. I am here this morning as an advocate for the foster and adoptive parents and children across the state.

I have practiced social work in Montana's Child Welfare System for 27 years. My husband, Bryan, and I were first licensed to provide foster care in 1984 and we adopted one of our daughters from the foster care system.

Today I am excited to come before you in support of HB353 to Revise the Foster Care Rates in the State of MT. The most important concept that I want you to come away from after listening to my testimony is this: **If you want healthy children, you must ensure (ensure = to make sure, make certain, guarantee) the health of those who care for them.** Foster and Adoptive parents shoulder the burden of caring for children and youth who are in the custody of the State of Montana. Our current reimbursement rate does not even provide for the *minimum* costs required to care for our children. Using the MARC (Minimum Adequate Rates for Children) guidelines from 2007 our foster parents are spending, at a *minimum*, an extra \$1,910 out of their own pockets each year for each child they care for. This does not include transportation to visits, meetings, mental health and doctor appointments.

When our first foster youth was placed in our home from the Mountain View School for Girls, she was 14 and we were 24 years of age. She and I developed a very strong emotional attachment that has endured throughout the years. But when she had to leave our home early for reasons too numerous to explain here, I was devastated. I was so hurt that Bryan would not allow another placement for 10+ years. Our first is now 38 and we are proud grandparents of 4 ranging in age from 3 to 20. In December we became great grandparents. Christmas, birthdays, graduations, births..we make sure the kids (and parents) get presents to remind them of our unconditional love.

In the various roles I have had in the past 27 years (including 15 years in Child Protective Services and 10 years as a Program Manager for a Therapeutic Adoption Program at Intermountain), I have watched the needs of children entering into the foster care system increase dramatically. These kids are in extreme emotional and psychological distress. Their emotional pain is acted out through escalating behaviors. Our adoptive daughter was in seven homes before she came to live with us...the kind of pain she endured and endures today is not something you fix. As a foster parent, you

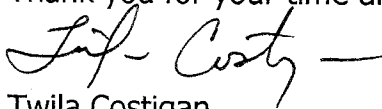
live with their understandable anger and rage, their sadness, frustration and feelings of abandonment, worthlessness and guilt. And the condition of your house reflects the physical manifestations of our children's pain.

Many parents today will tell you of the financial costs of being a foster or adoptive parent. I want to talk briefly about the emotional, psychological and spiritual pain endured by foster and adoptive parents. I think this is best illustrated by a foster mom curled up into the fetal position on her couch, unable to do anything but cry for hours. This foster mom was an ER nurse and she was tough as nails, but her foster son's pain overwhelmed her. I remember being in therapy with one of my daughters and my daughter telling her therapist, "I hurt mom because it feels good! I want her to feel like I do inside." I remember hours of rocking with our various kids just being there with them in their pain and despair. Feeling the disbelief inside my gut of the devastating life experiences they suffered at the hands of other adults, and knowing I was helpless to fix it...that I could only be with them and share their pain and despair. I remember the tears of many foster parents as they grieved losing the child they had grown to love back to their birth parents.

Current reimbursement for Foster Care is an average of \$17.87 per day. According to the Boarding Kennels website, you should expect to pay \$30 to \$100 per day for extremely good to top end boarding kennels. We say our children are more precious than our pets...but our actions conflict with our words.

Given the emotional, psychological and sometimes physical pain that foster and adoptive parents endure, funding for the *minimal* costs of taking care of children in the custody of the State of Montana should not even be an issue...but it is. I urge you to increase foster care rates and support HB353. Remember, **Healthy Caregivers = Healthy Children!**

Thank you for your time and energy and commitment to kids and their families!



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